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The Truth about the Pharisees

By

R. TRAVERS HERFORD

*Librarian of the Williams Library
of London; Author of Pharisaism.*



The Menorah Press

INTERCOLLEGIATE MENORAH ASSOCIATION

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PHARISAIC: *Resembling the Pharisees, an ancient Jewish sect, strict in doctrine and ritual, without the spirit of piety; laying great stress upon the external observances of religion and outward show of morality, and assuming superiority on that account; hypocritical; formal; self-righteous.*—NEW ENGLISH DICTIONARY.

When we speak of Pharisaism we mean obedience petrified into formalism, religion degraded into ritual, morals cankered by casuistry.—FARRAR'S ST. PAUL.

INTRODUCTION

AMONG many misconceptions and prejudices commonly held about the Jews none are more strongly felt and deeply rooted than those in regard to Pharisaism. From the time the New Testament was written there has been a black mark against the Pharisees, a mark which succeeding centuries have rather deepened than effaced. Most people think of the Pharisees (so far as they think of them at all) as the leaders of a sect in opposition to Jesus, the assailants whom he most severely denounced, a small class of narrow-minded people only

interesting or important because of their prominence in the Gospel story, and sufficiently described by the words "Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites." Nor has this common opinion concerning the Pharisees been challenged by the learned world. Indeed there has not been—at least by non-Jewish scholars—until very recently anything approaching a serious attempt to inquire adequately into the actual historical character of the Pharisees, their principles, aims, viewpoint and method, or to consider them impartially, not according to the representation of their opponents, but in the light of their own literature, the teaching of their own leaders and learned men, and of unprejudiced historical testimony generally.

The place of Pharisaism in history is much larger and more important than is commonly understood and recognized. Pharisaism originally came into being as the reply of the Jewish people to the challenge of the Babylonian Captivity in the sixth century B. C. But its viewpoint and teachings gave such complete expression to the beliefs and ideas with which the main body of Jews were in sympathy that Pharisaism succeeded in permanently molding the future character of Judaism. There has been no period in which Judaism as a whole has departed from the main lines first traced by the Pharisees. The distinctive name has been long ago disused; but the Judaism which has come down through the centuries, from the rise of Christianity to the present

day, is in its essential features Pharisaism. Christian scholars, therefore, depending usually on the New Testament, display a certain lack of proportion when they consider the Pharisees as merely a single small factor concerned in the ministry and death of Jesus, and confine their importance in history to their connection with this one event. For to the Pharisees themselves, with their already long history, the appearance of Jesus and the fate that befell him had no such importance, and was hardly more than a passing incident. Such as they were, they continued to be for long ages after the death of Jesus; and to judge them merely by their relation to that one event is to fail in the first essential of historical justice.

This essay, therefore, proposes to treat the Pharisees as a continuous body, an enduring element in the Jewish people; at first as one party in the nation in rivalry with another party, and later as the sole surviving party, when all the others had been, so to speak, left dead on the field after the last fatal fight with the enemy. The Pharisees alone carried forward the sacred treasure of the Jewish religion after the Temple had been destroyed and the land laid waste. All the Judaism which has come down to the present day owes its existence to the Pharisees, and if there is still abundant vitality in the Jewish religion it is the Pharisees who enabled it to endure. That is what really determines their place in history; and their unbroken continuance from the time of the

prophets to the time in which we now live is one indication that their place is not insignificant amongst those who have shaped the course and influenced the doctrines of the human race.

I. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF PHARISAISM

THE historical study of the origin and meaning of Pharisaism is rendered intricate and difficult by the scarcity of first-hand written documents about the period. The Pharisees, we know, certainly arose within the times covered by the Old Testament writings, for the actual composition of some of these writings and the collection and arrangement of them all as we now have them is their work. But the name Pharisee does not occur in the Old Testament. Our only sources, therefore, are Josephus, the New Testament and the Talmud, together with the rabbinical literature in general. None of these, certainly not the first two, date back to the period of the rise of Pharisaism. The New Testament, moreover, describes them from the outside, and as seen by observers who did not love them. Josephus speaks of them in terms adapted to his Roman readers (and if he did not say so himself it would be hard to guess that he himself was, or had been, a Pharisee). The Talmud, however, is pure Pharisaism from end to end. Specific statement in the Talmud about the actual origin of the Pharisees is,

to be sure, scanty and legendary; but it is not difficult to piece together from the many clues given in its pages a fair account of the early history of Pharisaism. For the Talmud is a self-revealed picture of the Pharisees, of the ideals to which they looked up, the principles which they held and the modes of their thought and action. By inference from these we should be able to discover some indication of the way they came to be such as they are there beheld.

Pharisaism was the reply made by the Jewish people to the challenge of the Babylonian captivity. The sharp discipline of the Exile taught the Jew that the Jewish religion, the worship and service of one God, must be kept free from idolatry, from the taint of the heathen cults of the neighboring people. This lesson was not at all new, since all the great prophets had taught it in their turn before the Exile. But the people whom the prophets addressed had paid little attention; Yaveh might be all the prophets proclaimed him to be; but the people went after other gods also, and "burned incense to the Queen of Heaven." But those who came back from Babylon came back with hearts purged of all desire to go astray after false gods. Few in number and incapable of great achievement as the Jewish community in Palestine after the return was, yet its members seem to have done what they could to keep before their eyes the ideal of the pure religion of Yahveh.

A FULL century passed before the man arose who effectively drove home the lesson of the Exile to the mind and heart of his countrymen. That man was Ezra and he is the real founder of Judaism in the strict sense of the term.

The conventional judgment on Ezra is incorrect, according to which he turned away from the religion of the prophets and set the religious life of the Jewish people on the down-grade from the heights which the prophets had reached. For, in the first place, the people as a whole had never reached those heights; and in the second, Ezra never disowned for a moment the prophetic teaching. In fact his whole life work was to convince the people that they *must* obey those very teachings which the prophets had been unable to make them follow. It is Ezra's achievement that, with some help from Nehemiah, the energetic governor of Jerusalem, and in the face of the severe opposition of the aristocracy, he was able finally to enlist a considerable majority of the Jewish community on his side for a thoroughgoing reconstruction of Jewish life.

Ezra's effort was first to establish the community as a "closed corporation" within a barrier which should separate them from their Gentile neighbors; and, second, to proclaim for their guidance the revelation of the will of God made through Moses. This divine revelation was that contained in the five books ascribed to Moses, what is usually but quite wrongly called the Law. *Torah* does not mean Law; it

means Teaching and it includes (as understood by Jews) all that God has *taught*, revealed to man in general as well as to Israel, through Moses. (This article will therefore not allude to the five books of Moses as the Law. Instead the Hebrew designation *Torah* will be left untranslated.)

Ezra publicly read the books containing the Torah of Moses, and the people, through their chief rulers and heads of families, solemnly pledged themselves to accept it and obey its precepts. This is the famous assembly described in Nehemiah ix, an event of enormous importance for the subsequent history of the Jewish people and marking the definite triumph of the principles and policy of Ezra. When Ezra passed from the scene he left behind him in the minds of a majority of the community the settled purpose of living separate from the Gentiles under the consecration of the Torah.

Although the name *Pharisee* does not appear until three centuries after the time of Ezra it was not without reason that the Pharisees looked upon Ezra as their "patron saint." For Pharisaism when it did appear served only to bring out into greater clearness and with more emphasis the principles of exclusion and of the supremacy of the Torah—was, indeed, only an improved technique for the fullest development of these ideals. These three centuries between the time of Ezra and the definite appearance of the Pharisees under that name were devoted to the working out of the practical application of Ezra's

principles to the daily life of the people. The Torah had been declared the supreme authority and the guide of life, but it was necessary that it be interpreted, correlated, explained so as to make its teaching applicable to changing conditions of life and circumstances not expressly provided for. To do this work arose the *Sopherim*, the Scribes, a title borne by Ezra himself.

The earliest Sopherim were probably for the most part priests, with whom were associated some Levites, and their first teaching must have been of the simplest character, hardly more than a statement of the lesson to be deduced from such and such a text. But it served its purpose if it brought the practical needs of life, religious and civil, individual and social, into relation with the word of the Torah. Moreover, since unrelated individual interpretations by single scribes would obviously lack consistency, agreement, and therefore authority, an effort was early made at some co-operation and consultation among them. What organized form this collaboration took is not known. If there was nothing as definite as a constituted assembly or council, at least there must have been some means for attaining agreement of authority. This is what probably underlies the allusions in the rabbinical literature to the Men of the Great Synagog, who in one passage at all events (*Tanhuma*, Beshall, p. 42^a) are expressly identified with the Sopherim. At any rate the Sopherim, whatever their organization, carried on their

work for several generations after Ezra. The death of Simon the Just, 270 B. C., marked the end of the period of the Sopherim and there is no clear evidence to show what was done in the matter of religious teaching until the establishment of the Sanhedrin, or Supreme Council, some time about the year 196 B. C.

THE formation of the Sanhedrin, which included laymen as well as priests and Levites and which dealt with political as well as religious questions, brought into view a certain significant divergence in the way the Torah had come to be regarded. On the one hand there were the priests, anxious to maintain their own privileges as monopolists of religious teaching, and the rulers, faced with the necessity of dealing with political questions and bent on preserving their own authority from the encroachments of the Torah; and these two groups united in an endeavor to limit the scope of the Torah to the explicit statements of the written text, understood in their literal meaning. The people's oath bound them to obey these and only these. Things not contained in the Torah, yet needful or desirable, were provided for by ordinances, *gazereth*, issued by the priests from time to time, by virtue of the authority conferred upon them in the Torah itself (*Deut.* xvii, 3). The consequence of this tendency would have been to make the Torah obsolete, since with the lapse of time its precepts would become more

and more impossible of fulfilment. The real authority would then pass into the hands of the priestly clique and the ruling class.

An opposing party, however, formed by reaction from the principle just described, held that the true meaning of the Torah was not defined by the text taken literally but could only be ascertained when the text was rightly interpreted, and, further, that the right interpretation was to be found in unwritten or oral tradition. This liberal conception of the Torah was supported chiefly by the common lay members of the community, who had no share in political affairs and whose chief concern was the religious welfare of the common people through the adoption of the Torah as a practical guide and rule of life. Conditioned by this practical necessity the Torah was to be made flexible enough to apply to all the changing conditions of the life of the community. In consequence the Torah was saved from dying of mere old age; it was transformed from an ancient record into a living force; it was exalted so as to become the vehicle of the whole revelation which God had given to Israel and the means by which the line of communication between God and Israel was kept open for all time.

These two tendencies or schools of thought did not emerge as definite political parties with distinguishing names until the establishment of the independent Jewish national state (about 150 B. C.) as

the result of the Maccabean revolt against the rule and influence of Hellenism. When Jonathan, Simon, and especially John Hyrcanus, all of the Maccabean family, destroyed the domination of the Greeks, they left the Jews free to solve their own political and religious problems in their own way, and in the light of their own best traditions. The two tendencies already discussed were representative of the most complete theories of Jewish life and formed an obvious contrast; they became at once, therefore, the two most important and powerful parties in the state, and held that position until the final catastrophe in the war of Bar-Cochba in the year 135 C. E. The names of the two opposing parties were the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The Sadducees were those who combined respect for the Torah, the ancient text literally understood, with an active concern for political affairs and closer relation with the Gentiles. The Pharisees were those who maintained the religion of Torah as the one supreme concern of vital importance for the Jews, who looked with disfavor upon foreign entanglements and secular interests in conflict with Torah.

In principle and theory the Pharisees as they finally and definitely emerged were the inevitable consequence of earlier religious teaching; the name of the party, however, presents considerable difficulty and is probably after all only an accidental accretion, since it is in no particular sense an expression of the main Pharisaic principles. How then

did the name Pharisee originate? First, it should be noted that while the Pharisees were rivals and opponents of the Sadducees, their distinctive name had no reference whatever to the Sadducees or to their rivalry with that party. Second, the Pharisees themselves did not use the name habitually to describe themselves. They usually referred to themselves as The Wise or The Wise of Israel. The word Pharisee—in Hebrew *pharush*, in Aramaic *pharish*—means “separated.” But apparently the term does not refer to the general Pharisaic principle of separation, but to an individual application of that principle in a single historical instance. This event was the formation under the impulse of John Hyrcanus (135-106 B. C.) of a voluntary association of religious-minded persons pledged to the strict observance of many then frequently violated principles of the Torah. There were four grades in this association in accordance with the strictness of their observance. The lowest grade was called that of the *Perushim* or Pharisees. And they were obviously so called because, being of the lowest grade in the association and thus nearest to the common people, the *Am-ha-aretz*, they marked the line of separation between the strict observer and the ordinary people of the land. Later, by a natural transition the name was used in the more general sense of a follower of the Torah, in contrast to an adherent of priestly and leviatical ordinances.

THE Pharisees became, then, the repositories of the religious ideals of the community. They were never a party in the sense of a group of men interested in national aggrandizement and political achievement. They were rather an association pledged to the perpetuation and dissemination of religious sentiments and moral practices. And although the Pharisees very seldom held supreme power in the state, they represented a substantial, continuous and enduring element which, in the complete ruin of the political and national parties of the Jewish state, still had enough numerical strength and steadfastness of heart to ensure the perpetuation of Judaism purely as a religious community. From the defeat of Bar-Cochba to very recent times national and political ideals have held very little interest for the Jewish people; Judaism as it has survived through the ages has been essentially Pharisaism.

The success of Pharisaism in educating a great number of the Jewish people in practices which made for isolation from the pagan world and consecration to the Torah was due to a large extent to their connection with the institution of the Synagog; it was through this that the Pharisees were enabled to come into close relations with the main body of the common people. The Pharisees were, it is true, not the founders of the Synagog; that institution probably originated as early as the Exile (586 B. C.). But when the Pharisees began to emerge as a definite

group in the state they were quick to recognize the close bond of sympathy between their own ideals and those of the Synagog, as well as its great possibilities for the future. For the Synagog, too, had always aimed to be the home and center of the religion of Torah. Those who gathered in its walls came with two objects: to worship God by praise and prayer; and to study the Torah, by learning or teaching the lessons to be derived from it.

The Synagog made no attempt to imitate the Temple, and had always a different aim in view. There was only one Temple; there were scores and hundreds of synagog, and they were to be found in every town and village in the land. The Temple, as long as it stood, was the visible expression of the religion of the whole Jewish people collectively; but the Synagog was the expression of their religion day by day and week by week for Jews not collectively, but as friends and neighbors, dwellers in the same locality. The Temple was in far-away Jerusalem; the Synagog was at their very door. Therefore, it could and did exert a powerful influence in developing the religion of the ordinary people by bringing it to bear upon the common concerns and experiences that made up their daily life. As this was precisely what the Pharisees were most desirous of doing it was only natural that the Pharisees should be the warmest friends and strongest supporters of the Synagog. The Pharisees, indeed, together with the Scribes, soon took over its develop-

ment, arranged the order of its services, collected its sacred books (those books which together we now call the Old Testament), and gave religious teaching to the people assembled to hear. The Synagog became a layman's church, free from the domination of priests, functioning in fact without anything which can be called a clergy. And it was because of the Pharisees' many services to the Synagog that the people felt a bond between themselves and the Pharisees; revered, loved and followed them as their teachers and leaders and friends. It was these people of the Synagog, steadfast in the life of Torah which the Pharisees had taught them, who saved Judaism when the nationalist policy ended in vain and Palestine as a political entity disappeared.

THE crisis which finally led to the adoption by the Jewish people of the ideals which were to guide them for centuries to come was precipitated by the reign of Herod (37-4 B. C.). Under his long, masterful, and unsympathetic rule a number of widely divergent groups had sprung up, presenting a much more complicated situation than the earlier simple rivalry between Pharisee and Sadducee. These new groups, moreover, were not antagonistic in the sense of parties fighting for political control of the state, but were opposed only because they represented different reactions against the tyranny of Herod. Their policies were but theories of defense and survival, with the purpose of enabling

the Jew to survive in the face of a common and cruel enemy. The Pharisees, still a large and powerful group true to their ancient traditions, offered the non-political solution of non-resistance, and followed the line of the older Hassidim in insisting that the continued life of the Jew depended on his pursuing in peace and quietness the religious life in accordance with the Torah. They were in the truest sense a peace party. Their policy of patient submission however did not satisfy all. There was a group, later called the Essenes, who deeming it impossible to endure when no prospect of relief was to be seen, withdrew into lonely desert places where they could live in peace and give themselves to undisturbed piety, unremitting devotion to the Torah, and a life of strict asceticism. At the other extreme from the pacific attitude of the Pharisees were the Zealots, passionate followers of the Torah, too, but men who gloried in the tradition of the Maccabeans and believed that the time had come to fight. The Torah, they said, must and could be defended, but only by throwing off the yoke of the Edomite king and defying all Gentile oppressors—even Rome itself, if need be, in the name of the God of Israel. The "wild men" of the Jewish community, they spoke constantly of war; and fired by a fanatical devotion to the national religion and the dream of national freedom, against which all argument was powerless, they called the nation again and again to arms.

The Pharisees, as is the fate of the more level-headed parties in time of great national excitement, found their authority considerably weakened by defections to the more extreme and active groups. At no time however, so writes Josephus after the fall of Jerusalem, did they lose the esteem and reverence of the majority of the people. They used all their influence to prevent a war with the Romans; and when they were finally dragged into it against their will by the Zealots they could only wait till the fury of the storm had spent itself.

And so it was in the last rash adventure, when Bar-Cochba led the Jews in their desperate attempt to win back their freedom, in that glorious but fatal revolt that marked the total overthrow of the Jewish state. The national life of the Jews and with it all possibility of existence under normal political ideals disappeared in that disaster; and if Israel had followed the example of other conquered peoples, the Jewish civilization might easily have vanished. In that great crisis Judaism was saved from dissolution only because the Pharisees were able to offer an alternate way of life, capable of perpetuating Jewish civilization without the political sovereignty that the Jews no longer possessed.

The Judaism which has come down through the centuries is substantially the Judaism of the Pharisees. Judaism has undergone many changes in these centuries, has developed new forms, produced new results, adapted itself to new conditions, but

it has remained throughout true to one fundamental vital principle—that of applying the divine revelation of the Torah to the whole range of life.

What was once the Jewish community settled in its own land is now a scattered multitude dispersed through well nigh every country in the civilized world. No political bond holds them together; there is no means by which they can formulate or carry out a common policy even if they should wish to do so. Least of all are they the powerful secret society which some have supposed them to be. They have no such united political influence, nor would the thought of exerting such an influence ever possess any attraction for them. That which has enabled them to survive is the old religious ideal to which the Pharisees first gave full expression, and this enabled them to survive in undiminished strength because their ideal was not dependent on political organization for its fulfilment.

Thus the Jews have remained, persecuted but not destroyed, victims of the manifold dislike and ill-will of the nations in whose midst they lived, pursuing aims which were seldom understood, with peculiarities of observance which exposed them to ridicule, doubtless with some faults and failings of their own—what people has not?—and certainly with others bred in them by the treatment they have received at the hands of professing Christians. Beneath all the external appearance of Judaism, unlovely and repellent as it may sometimes appear to the outsider,

there has always dwelt and still dwells in its inmost heart, cherished there with devout and reverent love, the Torah as God's most precious gift to his people and the hope and longing for that day when in the recognition and faithful service of all his children on earth "the Lord shall be One and his name One."

II. THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE PHARISEES

HAVING traced the historical development of Pharisaism, a fuller understanding requires a more careful and detailed examination of what might be called the Pharisaic attitude to life: its impulses and motives, its intentions, its procedure and policies, and their consequences for the history of the Jews and the religious development of mankind. Necessities of space exclude many questions that might properly call for attention in a monograph of the Pharisees; but there are certain aspects of the subject which seem especially worthy of consideration, the more so since it is on those points that common opinion is least favorable to the Pharisees.

What precisely did the Pharisees set themselves to achieve and how did they go about accomplishing their self-assigned duty? Their main task, as they conceived it, was, specifically, to establish the authority of the Torah as the full and inexhaustible revelation made by God to man. By the Torah they

meant, of course, not merely the written word of the "Five Books of Moses" but the inner meaning of what was there written; and the source of that right interpretation was held by the Pharisees to be oral tradition, assumed to have been imparted to Moses and unfolded into fuller detail by successive teachers ever since. In addition, the other Scriptures now forming the Old Testament were held to be further elucidations of the Torah, minor rays of the heavenly light whose chief focus was the Five Books. This divine revelation, moreover, was not conceived to have ceased with its formulation in the words of the Scriptures, but was thought of as always fresh and always growing because God enlightened the minds of men in every age to receive more of what he would teach. This theory of the Torah was expressed under the form of interpretation of the ancient text and it was made effective by means of an exegesis which defied all ordinary rules of grammar and syntax. Nevertheless it was done in all sincerity and done for the purpose of harmonizing the ancient text with the deeper insight and higher thoughts of the Jewish mind as it increased in wisdom and knowledge of God. This liberal and evolutionary concept of the authority of the Scriptures was perhaps the most distinctive contribution of the Pharisees to the common stock of the religious thought of mankind at large.

It belongs to the irony of history that the Pharisees should be charged with a bigoted and stiff-

necked hardening and sterilizing of the religion of the Jews when it was they, as contrasted with the Sadducees and other literalists, and they alone, who gave it the flexibility and adaptability of spirit that enabled it to live and to survive.

REMARKABLE as this conception was merely as an intellectual contribution, the Pharisees were not satisfied to allow it to remain a mere thought without practical application, a purely speculative opinion having no direct bearing on life. Their chief interest had been from the beginning a practical one; the chief end of man was, they insisted, not merely to know what the Torah contained, to have a perception of the existence of a divine command, but rather to recognize the supreme duty of *doing* the will of God as expressed in the injunctions of the Torah. Actual day by day observance of the precepts of the Torah was taken to be the chief responsibility both of the community as a whole and of every member in particular. Obviously much study, interpretation and instruction was necessary before the Torah could serve as a complete guide for life. The first step, in what was a long process, was to take specific note of the actions which were expressly stated in so many words: "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not." These definite precepts, positive or negative, are called *Mitzvoth*, and it was the duty of the Jew who would live in obedience to the Torah to fulfil all the *Mitzvoth* which came his way.

His feeling was: "Under these circumstances I am commanded in the Torah to do so and so. It is God's will that I should do so; in doing this particular thing in the appointed way I am obeying God."

But suppose no direction was given in the Torah as to how the *Mitzvah* was to be performed? Or again, suppose a case arose for which there was no express command, no precise *Mitzvah*? How was the Torah to be obeyed, how was the will of God to be done in such a case? Answers to such questions were found by interpreting the Torah, by inferring, from what it *did* say in one case, what it *would have* said in another case, if it had happened to deal with that other case. Here is precisely the point at which Pharisee and Sadducee parted company. The Sadducee said the Torah had nothing more to teach than the literal meaning expressed in its written words. Things not stated in the ancient text might be done by special ordinance of the priests; but such ordinances were not Torah and did not claim to be. The Pharisees, on the other hand, admitted no distinction in degree of authority between the Torah itself and the interpretation of the Torah added by unwritten tradition. For the process of making the written text clear and precise where it was vague and indefinite seemed to the Pharisee, intent always on his ethical purpose, as necessary and as holy as the original transcription of the Torah. The duty of man was to obey God; therefore there must be for every act of his life a way, discoverable

to man by careful thinking and mature deliberation, of fulfilling the will of God by some specific rule of right conduct. The results of the interpretations of the Torah made in this spirit were formulated in rules; such a rule of right conduct was called a *Halachah*. The word *halach* in Hebrew means "to walk"; one of its commonest uses in the Old Testament is in phrases where the duty of a man who would serve God is said to be "to walk" in his statutes or according to his Torah. The transition is an obvious one. To the Pharisee any direction given by a competent authority intended to teach a man how he should "walk" if he would obey the Torah was a *Halachah*, a rule of right conduct.

The *Halachah* was never determined by an individual by himself, no matter what his wisdom. The *Halachah* was declared only after a consultation among the teachers, and decided by a vote of the majority in order that in a matter of so great importance, affecting the life and actions of the whole community, the final decision should represent the opinion and carry the authority of the wisest, most learned and most experienced scholars, acting in their capacity as trustees of the people. Furthermore, it was so obviously to the interest of the community to preserve the *Halachah*, when defined by competent authorities, as guides for future generations, that a number of such definitive judgments came to be remembered and handed down from one generation of teachers to another. This procedure, dating from the

very early days of the Sopherim, was the beginning of a tradition of Halachah (referred to in the New Testament as the "Tradition of the Elders") which was later embodied in the Mishnah and its commentary, the Gemara, both together forming the Talmud. The Scribes of the Pharisees, as they are termed in the New Testament, that is, the accredited teachers of the Pharisees, were instrumental also in producing another work, similar in method but different in content, the *Haggadah*. The Halachah dealt, it will be remembered, with only one element in the Torah, viz: its precepts, commands, injunctions. But the Torah contained also teachings on other subjects, as the nature of God, his providence, and other phases of religious doctrines as contrasted with precept. The interpretation of these passages in the Torah formed the basis of this other work called the *Haggadah*, from the Hebrew word meaning "announcement," "declaration." *Haggadah* is probably the more general and earlier term, and in that case it referred to all interpretation of the Torah until the time when a special term—Halachah—was devised for the preceptive teaching. The initiating of these great works, both animated by the same spirit, was the most important specific achievement of the Pharisees. Through them they were enabled to enlarge and to develop the Torah so as to make the teaching therein contained of immediate practical service in the religious life of the Jewish community.

The impulse and motives underlying Pharisaism should be by now so clear as to make further discussion necessary. But there is a persistent misconception that it worth the moment's notice sufficient to refute it. The chief desire of the Pharisees was, one hears repeatedly, superciliously to withdraw from contact with humanity at large; their impulse a self-righteous, holier-than-thou disdain for rival cultures. That the Pharisees preached isolation is true, but the separation they sought was more than an attitude cherished for its own intrinsic worth. Separation was for them a practical matter of self-defense impelled by their burning desire to preserve the existence of the Jew and safeguard his splendid heritage, the Torah. The Torah was to the Pharisee a possession of such precious worth and the duty of abiding by its precepts a duty of such supreme concern that he dared not risk the infiltration of pagan customs and practices inevitable in close association with the Gentile world. The motive that animated the Pharisaic policy of isolation was exactly the same as that from which all its activities sprung—the desire to make manifest the divine revelation of the Torah in the daily business of man.

WHAT, finally, were the ultimate effects of the Pharisaic spirit and policy of Judaism? A somewhat roundabout method, but one as good as any, would be to consider critically some of the com-

mon misstatements about the effects of Pharisaism, with the hope that in the process of refuting these misapprehensions a positive picture of the true achievements of the Pharisees will block itself out.

A common condemnation of Pharisaism is that it led to a falling away, a decadence from the inspired exhortations of the great prophets. The contrast is drawn between the free utterance of the prophet with his "Thus saith the Lord," and the constrained pronouncement of the Rabbi: "Thus it is written" or "Thus the sages have taught." Certainly the contrast is clear; but the difference will be found on examination to be not one of ideals and beliefs, but merely one of the form and method of imparting these beliefs. The prophets in their magnificent declamations about God, his righteousness and power and wisdom and justice, raised the religious conceptions of Israel to the highest point they ever attained; but we do not read that people who heard the words of the prophets took them to heart and amended their lives in consequence. The great need was for some method by which the teaching of the prophets could be put into practice. This method, as we have seen, the Pharisees developed. Certainly there is no breach with prophetic teachings in the Pharisaic exaltation of the Torah, since both alike aim at obedience to the will of God; nor is there evidence to show that the Pharisees ever thought of contradicting or supplanting the prophetic teachings. Pharisaism is "applied prophecy." Nothing

else than that is meant by the famous saying in the Talmud (B. Bath 12^a) that "prophecy was taken from the prophets and given to the wise,"—meaning the Rabbis. The Pharisees came after the prophets "not to destroy but to fulfil." To say, then, that the Pharisees, who were precisely those who saved the work of the prophets from being in vain, represented a debasement of prophecy is an obvious misstatement.

A second imputation about the Pharisees (important because it expresses what a great majority of Christians, on the warrant of the New Testament, believe to be true about the Pharisees) is that they made religion into a hard system of rules, and the service of God into the performance of prescribed acts instead of a free expression of inward devotion and the willing obedience to conscience; that this system of rules (called always by Christians "the Law") was a heavy burden on the Jew from which no release was possible except through the influence of the Gospel; that, finally, the practice of Pharisaism led to hypocrisy, an outward show of piety with no corresponding inward sincerity. In attempting to answer this grave accusation let us note that the sources of these judgments are confessedly hostile ones; Jesus and his disciples were Jews but not Pharisees. The attitude of the New Testament writers in general and Paul in particular was definitely antagonistic. Later writers in the Christian

Church were not only biased, but completely ignorant of the system they condemned.

As to this alleged hardening and sterilizing of religion, under the tyranny of the "Law" (Christian writers insist on rendering "Torah" by "Law"; this single mistranslation of the Hebrew word meaning "teaching" is actually the source of the innumerable condemnations of Judaism as a "legalistic" religion): if the effect of the "Law" was to kill religion, how explain the full vigor of the Synagog in the time of Jesus, since the existence of the Synagog more than any other religious institution of the Jew depended on the spontaneous religious spirit of the people? How explain that it was the custom of Jesus himself to go there on the Sabbath? Nor is there any record of the Synagog, with its vital concern for religion, ever protesting against the Torah; the Torah and the Synagog in point of fact went hand in hand. Did this union engender a sterile Judaism? When one realizes that in the worship of the Synagog the Psalms, the greatest purely devotional literature in the world, held a foremost place, this assumption becomes absurd. If the men of the Synagog were cold legalists would they have included the Psalms in their services to be a standing rebuke to their hollow pretensions of piety? The truth is that the men of the Synagog and the Pharisees who directed its activities included the Psalms because they loved them and felt, as worshippers in all ages since have felt, their incomparable power

as devotional songs. But admitting this, is it still not true that the Pharisaic system included the Halachah, and was this not a rigid law binding the entire community to precise, prescribed and mechanical observances? On the contrary, it can be stated categorically, the Halachah always emphasized the *intention* behind the act, which was to perform the will of God, and never its merely perfunctory performance. The *opus operatum* counted for nothing, the mere doing of the prescribed act without the intention of serving God had no religious worth, the spirit animating the deed was the all important consideration. Nor did the Pharisee stress greatly the possibilities of accumulating "rewards" and "merits"; his aim was to do the will of God for its own sake.

The Halachah indeed was intended to serve as a complete guide of life, and to offer as far as possible a detailed authoritative regimen by which the Jew could consecrate his daily life to the service of God's will. Any theory involving a definite and codified system of practice is open to the grave danger that the outward act is performed without the inward purpose, with the result of formalism and hypocrisy. The Pharisees were fully aware of this danger and were always especially concerned to guard themselves against it. Human nature being what it is, there are in all religions those who take religion too lightly, those who care too much for mere form and too little for the inner spirit, and it is not true that the Pharisees are more inclined to be hypocrites than the

adherents of other religions. A hostile observer is never in a position to form a right judgment of a rival religion by a causal inspection of its observances. A ceremony will seem meaningless and mechanical to him, as most of the observances of the Pharisees probably did to their critics—because he has no way of knowing the inner spring impelling the outward show. It is not difficult to understand how an outsider, seeing the Pharisee perform his elaborate ritual, and being unable to read the inner heart of the devotee, could rush out and brand him hypocrite.

A THIRD common objection to Pharisaism is that the system of Halachah weakened the sense of moral responsibility of its adherents; the Jew was not free to act from his own conscience but must conform to an external rule. The force of this objection is considerably lessened when it is remembered that the Jew has always regarded moral obligation more from the point of view of the community than from that of the individual. The main factor in his decision as to the morality of any particular act was the thought that he was a member of the community of Israel, not a mere isolated being. If, therefore, he saw that the consensus of the representative leaders and teachers of the community had established the morality of an action, he seldom found himself in a moral conflict with Halachah on one side and conscience on the other. A proof

of this fact is that in all the rabbinical literature familiar to the writer he is unable to recall a single instance of such a conflict between conscience and Halachah, or any reference to the question. However that may be, it is beyond question that the ethical sensitiveness of the Jewish mind was not weakened or blighted by the Halachah. Ethics has been the subject of more devoted study among Jews in the direct line of Pharisaism than any other department of thought; anyone who knows the rabbinical literature knows well the fine ethical spirit and delicate moral perception that marks its best teaching; knows also that its development of the ethical teachings of the Old Testament was always towards a higher and not toward a lower degree of refinement and purity. The actual effect of the Halachah was to provide not only a training of character, a discipline of mind and heart and a system of guide and control, accepted voluntarily and maintained only by social opinion, but to serve also to hold the Jewish community together as a distinct entity when every other bond of national life had been broken.

My hope has been by these refutations of common misunderstandings to build up simultaneously the positive outlines of the Pharisaic point of view. Little more is needed now correctly to assess the value of Pharisaism to the Jew. That consists chiefly, to repeat, in its having provided a means of survival to the Jew. Ezra saved Judaism from decay at the time of the Exile by proclaiming the

Torah the supreme religious authority, and gathered to it a body of pledged adherents and resolute and devoted defenders. The Pharisees, following in his footsteps, saved Judaism from paralysis by their inspired system of adapting the Torah to the practical problems of daily life. Those who have condemned Pharisaism and deplored its existence have not pointed out any other method that ought to have been adopted; and, in any case, the fact remains that of the forms of Judaism only Pharisaism was able to survive the two great crises of Jewish history. That Pharisaism was able to save Judaism to a world that needs it gives it a claim to an approving verdict from the history of civilization.

III. PHARISAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

THE significance of Pharisaism in the religious development of mankind consists precisely in the part that Judaism, as we know it, has played in this development; for Judaism as it has survived is pure Pharisaism. Whatever gifts Judaism has brought to the spiritual life of humanity, these are in truth Pharisaic contributions. A fruitful method of appraising these ideals of Pharisaism or Judaism (as you will) and their consequences, is to consider them in their relationship to the ideals and achievements of Christianity. These two religious systems have confronted each other for nine-

teen centuries, have influenced each other profoundly, both internally and externally, and still exist side by side, offering rival divine revelations, and apparently no nearer to a reconciliation than they were at the beginning.

Our effort shall be to define their characteristic traits, compare their ideals and practices, trace their relation to each other, and finally to try to point out what their places have been in the religious discipline of humanity, and to forecast, as well as one can, their future part in the religious life of the world.

We shall not endeavor to assign the relative merits of the two religions—who is there, indeed, who has the right to judge? Superficial and misinformed Christian apologists have been satisfied to seize upon certain aspects of Judaism, which they had no means of understanding, and to draw from these various comfortable inferences as to the alleged inferiority of Judaism to Christianity. These scholars point to the Halachah, with its minute definition of trifling acts, and its reduction, as they conceive it, of religion to a mass of formality. Paul, they say, rid the world of this burden; he struck off the chains that fettered the free play of the individual religious spirit. But is it not true that when the Christian Church, soon after, found itself in a position very similar to that of the Pharisees, in need of a bond to hold its adherents together in a religious community, it also developed a system of constraint? The con-

fession of faith and the whole mass of speculative theology developed from the Creed as a method of coercion on the members of the Church is open to exactly the criticism by which the Halachah is disparaged. Here is a case where the retort is justified, "Physician, heal thyself."

The real distinction between Judaism (as embodied in Pharisaism) and Christianity (as taught by the missionaries of the Church), as they confronted each other, was a fundamental one, fraught with far-reaching consequences for their mutual relationship. As systems they were fundamentally dissimilar, wholly incommensurable and completely impossible of harmonization in a single religious scheme. That is the final answer (if one is needed) why Christianity has never been able to assimilate Judaism. Judaism, as has been stated, is a detailed system of ethical *practices* by which its adherents consecrated their daily lives to the *service* of God. The cornerstone of Judaism was the *deed*, not the *dogma*. The fundamental characteristic of Christianity, as it was preached by the apostles, and as it is embodied today in both the Protestant and the Catholic Churches was, on the other hand, faith in a Person, that person being, of course, the Founder. "*Believe* in the Lord Jesus," says Christianity, "and thou shalt be saved." Salvation for professing Christians is not a consequence of duty *done* in the conscious service of God; it is something mystically *received* as a gift of divine grace. Christ was regarded as an agent

in a mysterious transaction whereby a divine purpose of redemption by love had been accomplished by a personal sacrifice, the benefits of which were open to all those who were willing but to signify their faith in him. Christianity and Judaism appealed to different sides of human nature; the former to the passive side, the latter to the active side. Christianity stressed *faith*, Judaism *right action*. Christianity preached a mystical communion through faith with a divine power by which the evils of life disappear without any effort of the personal will. Judaism insisted on the conscious individual consecration of each single human being by thought and will and act to the service of his God.

This contrast is, of course, not complete, nor is the conflict between Christianity and Judaism that of two independently conceived and mutually exclusive systems. For Christianity when it first appeared in a complete form included in it many details and ideals borrowed from the Pharisees, and then diverted to Christian uses. Christianity is, to be sure, more closely akin to the apocalyptic type of Judaism, but its debt to the Pharisees is by no means inconsiderable. Christianity, for instance, owes much to that great Pharisaic institution, the Synagog, whereby it was able to foster religion on the lines of personal piety without priest and without ritual; was indebted to the Pharisees, in fact, not only for the form but for the very idea of congregational worship. Again, it was the Pharisees of the older

time who collected the Hebrew Scriptures, which the Church appropriated to her own use, never even saying "By your leave," and denying that the Jews had henceforth any right to them; and without which Christianity would have lacked the chief means of proving to the Gentiles the truth of its message. Further, the general ethical teaching taken over into Christianity was substantially that of the Pharisees, though not exclusively so.

The fact that certain common factors exist in Pharisaism and Christianity does not, however, blur the fundamental distinction between these systems pointed out above. The Christian conception was so completely at variance with Pharisaic ideals that whatever Pharisaic doctrines it chose to borrow suffered a complete transmutation due to the radical shifting of emphasis inevitable in their incorporation into Christian doctrine. The breach between Judaism and Christianity was made final by the pre-eminent place which Christianity, for the purpose of strengthening its central teaching, gave to a whole mass of doctrine completely alien to Judaism and borrowed from various Greek, Roman and Oriental cults and mysteries; dogmas such as those of sacrifice, vicarious atonement, salvation through the voluntary death of a savior of divine origin. Christianity, then, though it embodied many old Hebraic ideals, was in effect a new religion, a completely novel and revolutionary statement of the relationship between Man and God. And the repudia-

tion of Christianity by the Pharisees was due to nothing more nor less than their immediate perception of its absolute divergence from Pharisaic ideals.

JUDAISM refused then to assimilate the Christian ideals, and insisted on preserving its own religious integrity. Christian apologists, in their effort to relate this fact to a general scheme of the religious development of mankind, have adopted a very simple explanation and interpretation of the action of the Jews. Judaism, they say, was but a preparation for Christianity; when Christianity appeared the purpose for which Judaism had been created had been fulfilled, and Judaism would necessarily lose its vitality and worth as a religion and disappear. This theory was taught quite definitely by Paul in the New Testament. The Torah had been the schoolmaster to bring men to Christ, and Christ had superseded it. Paul, it should be pointed out, was enough of a realist to see the formidable difficulties presented to this theory by the facts. Being unable to deny the continued existence of Judaism he tried to explain it by declaring (*Rom. xi, 25*) that a blindness of heart had befallen Israel, which would last until the fulness of the Gentiles had come in. But the Church, repudiating this theory, announced that the day of Judaism was definitely over, and its inheritance taken from it and given to another; that Christ had annulled the Law, and those who still clung to it were clinging to a mere phantom. Hence-

forth, the Jews, if they existed at all, were to serve only as an example and a warning.

This theory, conclusive and satisfactory as it is from the Christian point of view, is shown clearly to be wrong by the undeniable fact that Judaism, and more particularly Pharisaism, did not die out then or since. The rise of Christianity did not injure the vitality of Judaism, impair its truth, or weaken its validity in the eyes of its adherents. They stood fast by their religion in the evil days of the two great wars and the terror that followed the last; and when the persecution was over, in 138 C. E., the Rabbis took up their old task of guiding and maintaining the religious life of the people with unabated confidence in that task and trust in God who had appointed it for them, even though he had so sorely chastened them. From that time down to the present day the Jews have remained a people of undying hope and unconquerable faith, in spite of all that Christians could do to convert them, to crush them, or ignore them. Neither Christ nor Paul nor anybody else has canceled or destroyed Judaism; whatever Christians may say, Judaism is still a vital, real, and intensely held religion.

THE usual view of the relation of Judaism to Christianity, in which Judaism is said to be a preparation for Christianity, is thus seen to be untenable. It has as its necessary premise the partisan, and therefore worthless, judgment of Judaism as an

inferior religion, and as its proof the absolutely unfounded assumption that Judaism has disappeared. A wider view is possible, we believe, which shall include Judaism both before and after Christ, a view of which shall show both Judaism and Christianity parts in one great whole, one vast design, each having there a necessary place and function, neither being the rival of the other or superseding it, but both preparing in their different ways for a universal religion of humanity expressing the ultimate triumph of the divine will.

This view will depend on a statement of the significance of Christianity somewhat different from the usual one. A rapid historical survey of the development of Christian dogma will hint at its distinctive function in the creation of the religious world as we have it today. The tendency of Christianity, it was pointed out above, was to diverge away from Pharisaism and towards Greek, Roman, and other pagan doctrines; this fact has a very important significance for our thesis. From these alien peoples Christianity received its chief sacerdotal and sacramental ideas. As time went on, with the increasing proportion of Greeks and Romans among the leading Christian teachers, there was a like increase in the part which Greek and Roman concepts played in Christian dogma and practice. Much of the common ceremonies and observances of Christians in the early ages were nothing more than rites and practices of the pagans taken over bodily and, so to

speak, sprinkled with holy water. The classic example of this process is the transition by which the Pope gradually stepped into the place of the Roman Emperor. The triumph of Christianity over paganism is a proof of the success of this policy of compromise and assimilation. Nor will anyone deny that Christianity, through this conversion by its missionaries of the pagan world, raised immeasurably the general level of the spiritual life of humanity. But this intimate contact with the pagan world involved a very dangerous risk to the Gospel itself and the purity of its teachings. This danger consisted in the possible corruption of Christianity by a religion and morality of a lower order than itself. And we believe that Christianity in gaining the world might easily have lost its own soul were it not for certain restraining and regulating influences that it bore incorporated in itself, namely, the conceptions that it still retained from its Jewish origin. Had the Church cut herself loose from Pharisaic Judaism as completely as she wished to do and thought she had done, it is conceivable that Christianity would have completely amalgamated with the religions of the Gentile world. It was its Jewish inheritance alone that saved it from this peril of complete immersion in Gentile practices and a consequent much lower rank in the scale of religions.

THE foundations have now been laid for a final indication of the relative place of Pharisaic

Judaism and Christianity in world religion. These two religious systems, one recalls, represented distinct and contrasted viewpoints on life, neither of which could by any possibility be transmuted into the other, or rightly regarded as the development or the completion of the other. Each had its own right of existence as each had its own truth to proclaim. Let us consider the contributions that each made to the greatest religious achievement of all times, the uplifting and purifying of the various peoples who were to compose the modern world. The specific function of Christianity was, since the peculiar adaptive power of its teachings better fitted it for that work, to *begin* that great task. Judaism's function it was to remain as a co-present and correlative religion, because it contained elements of permanent religious value not present in or compatible with Christianity. Thus, whatever part Christianity was intended to play in the providential design for mankind, that part could only be played if there were present also, and at every stage, a living Judaism. Christian efforts to convert the Jews or to destroy Judaism were in reality attempts at suicide. She was threatening her own life, since she was trying to suppress a form of religion other than her own and equally necessary with her own if her special task was to be fulfilled. The Church has always regarded a living Judaism as a continual danger. But a dead Judaism would have been to her a fatal disaster.

Still speaking in terms of the divine plan one might say that Judaism and Christianity were both necessary for the work of raising and purifying the religious and moral condition of humanity—Christianity as an immediate agent in the work, and Judaism for its later stages, and to safeguard Christianity meanwhile against the danger of its task. Judaism waited and still waits, not because of any “hardening in part” (in the mischievous phrase of Paul), but because the best she has to give, the treasure-trove stored up against the future by the Pharisees, will only then find acceptance when the preparatory work of Christianity has been done, and the world is ready for the religion which will unite the imperishable elements of both.

That Judaism still exists for the performance of its allotted task is the contribution of the Pharisees to world religion. The Pharisees developed Judaism, and their successors, the Rabbis, worked in exactly their spirit to preserve it a living religion in the face of a persecuting Church and a scornful and hostile world. They saw they had nothing to gain religiously from Christianity, and the centuries, demonstrating the Church’s anxiety to be “all things to all men,” only served to confirm them in their isolation. In the *Halachah* they had both a bond to keep the Jewish community together and a cloak to shield the spirit of Judaism. The *Halachah* was a veritable “armor of God” whereby it should be “able to withstand in the evil day and having done

all to stand.” The Pharisees, with their instrument the *Halachah*, did not in any degree bring about the degradation of Judaism, its reduction to barren formalism, the descent from prophetic freedom to organized hypocrisy, so that Christianity might arise as the living from the dead, leaving Judaism a shrivelled corpse. What they did achieve was the preservation of Judaism in all its nobility and purity through the ages to fulfil even at the terrible cost of sorrow and suffering the task which God had given it to do.

What form that task will assume in ages yet to come it is vain to speculate. But when the time shall come when Christianity has done all it can do under the forms and conditions it has hitherto adopted, there will be a Judaism able and ready to offer its imperishable treasure, kept safe through the ages, to a world which will no longer scorn it. And at last the two great religions which will each have accomplished that for the sake of which God made them two and not one, will join in His service and inspire the lives of His children. To have begun the preparation for that far-off divine event is the true significance of Pharisaism.

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